

REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP TO ASSIST LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Grant Application

Ventura County Superintendent of Schools Office

April 30, 2001

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805-383-1901

Regional Partnership to Assist Low-Performing Schools

The Ventura County Superintendent of Schools Office (VCSSO) Regional Partnership team looks forward to the exciting opportunity to build upon an extensive history of regional collaboration and service to districts and schools through participation in this Regional Grant. The Team and County Office acknowledge that this shall require changes to take place both within our current organizational structure and function.

Guiding Vision of Ventura County Regional Partnership

Dr. Charles Weis, Ventura County Superintendent of Schools, has challenged County Office staff and Regional partners alike to evaluate and re-think their work with all schools, but most especially those identified as “under-performing.” His vision requires staff to focus on research-based, data-driven, and highly innovative strategies that no longer replicate ineffective past practices. The VCSSO motto of “Commitment to Quality Education for All” will be enhanced by the systemic changes necessitated by this plan.

VCSSO’s Advanced Educational Support of Professionals (AESOP) Partnership is committed to working with under-achieving schools and schools with under-achieving subgroups to help all pupils perform at or above rigorous grade level standards. With an emphasis on valuing teachers as the number one educational resource and recognizing administrators as instructional leaders, AESOP Teams will partner with schools and districts to address their unique needs, build on their strengths, and overcome their challenges. The AESOP approach will consist of on-site, on-going, research-based, data-driven, differentiated intervention in conjunction with a coordinated utilization of existing local and regional services.

BACKGROUND

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ventura County serves 140,000 students in predominately rural and suburban school districts of varying sizes ranging from 20,000 to 28 students. The county is representative of the other counties along the central coast. Demographics reflect a cross section of the state’s student population, making it an ideal setting for the development of models to be disseminated statewide.

	State	Ventura County
Native Americans	.9%	.9%
Hispanic	43.2%	43.1%
White, not Hispanic origin	35.9%	47.4%
African American	8.4%	2.4%
Asian, Filipino and Pacific Islander	11%	5.7%

In the 1999-2000 school year 35 Ventura County schools or 21.7% did not meet their school-wide and/or comparable improvement for sub groups. Districts within Ventura County are reflective the state's economic diversity, ranging from the socio-economically challenged too highly privileged. This trait distinguishes Ventura County from its neighboring regions, where such trends are far less diverse.

EXISTING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

VCSSO strongly believes in fostering relationships and developing collaboratives with state agencies, regional service providers, universities, and local school districts. VCSSO's AESOP Model will continue capacity-building activities and local sustainability by use of these partnerships.

VCSSO has a long history of ongoing collaborative work with regional providers including, Statewide System of School Support (S-4), California School Leadership Academy (CSLA), Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), California Technology Assistance Program (CTAP), universities, and CCTC state-funded programs (BTSA, Internship Credential, and Pre-Intern Certificate). These partnerships have produced the following variety of professional development and support services for districts.

- Region 8 collaboratively plans with California School Leadership Academy (CSLA) and S4 to jointly present two-day Standards Implementation Institutes building county office capacity while serving districts and schools. Follow-up sessions serve to sustain new learning over time.
- SB 1882 California Professional Development Consortium (PDC).
- Within Region 8, Ventura County and CSLA have designed delivery of School Leadership Team training and Program Quality Review to maintain consistency between the programs.
- The regional AVID program has identified a National Demonstration School in Ocean View School District.
- University partnerships include the South Coast Writing Project, Tri-Counties Math Council, and California Subject Matter Projects housed at the University of California at Santa Barbara.
- The local Migrant Education program pursues improvements in pupil academic achievement and parent-school communication for ELL students.

VCSSO consistently participates in grant opportunities to support state initiatives, such as:

- Ventura County School-to-Career Partnership has successfully mapped student content standards to vocational course objectives.
- Middle Grades Reading Support Project, one of four statewide, has been funded to support secondary reading and the development of a model-training center for reading interventions.
- VCSSO, local districts, California State University, Channel Islands, and California Lutheran University are committed partners to support under-prepared teachers actively participating in intern/pre-intern programs.

VCSSO creates/offers innovative learning opportunities for county, district, and school leaders:

- Ventura County Institute for Principals (VIP) and Assistant Principals for Educational Excellence (APEX) are countywide professional development networks which collaborate with nationally recognized educators and researchers; e.g. Doug Reeves, Grant Wiggins, Richard Stiggins, Michael Fullan, Jay McTighe, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Debra Pickering.

- VCSSO's Research and Evaluation Department has worked closely with school districts to assess data and to formally evaluate district, state and federal projects.
- VCSSO annually contracts with local districts to release several of their highly innovative and skilled teachers to serve as countywide teachers on leave. These subject matter experts then work with classroom teachers in all 20 districts in the county.
- VCSSO and district leaders traveled to El Paso, Texas, to study high-poverty, high-achieving schools.
- A 12-member team of Ventura County managers attended a two-day training in March 2001 of the Riverside County Assistance Team's process for support of low-performing schools. The team included members of the VCSSO Superintendent's Council.
- A management team comprised of visitors to the Riverside program held a series of planning meetings with county and regional participation to formulate guiding principles and goals for a proposed regional partnership to assist low-performing schools.
- Kern County Superintendent of Schools Office, an approved and experienced External Evaluator, came to VCSSO and shared effective strategies and processes in the planning and implementation of regional partnerships to assist low performing schools.
- A visitation to the Stanislaus County Office of Education is scheduled in May to observe the SCOE school support team in action.
- Team members will participate in External Evaluators' training meetings at Los Angeles County of Education and "shadow" External Evaluators as they do their work at the school site.
- Six team members will attend a seven-day CSLA "Network of Educational Coaches" training.

The extensive shared knowledge base and capacity building, which has been developed over time as a result of the above activities, has provided an ideal foundation for VCSSO to undertake the successful implementation of the Regional Partnerships Grant.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

The Ventura County Superintendent of Schools Office and regional providers, in a recent poll of district and school representatives, surveyed perceived barriers to student achievement/successes. Additional barriers were identified by observation of district schools over time by county office instructional leaders. Barriers were identified as follows:

Standards

- *Misalignment* between and among standards, curriculum, and assessment
- Overwhelmed principals and teachers offering "thin" instruction in *too many* poorly analyzed, non-integrated, and non-prioritized *standards*
- Standards-based education *not fully implemented*
- Incompletely implemented standards-based instructional support systems

Testing and Data Analysis

- Lack of common, easily administered/scored *standards-based assessments*
- Low levels of *data-analysis proficiency* among principals and teachers

Instruction

- *Under-prepared and/or ineffective teachers* possessing low levels of content knowledge and proficiency in differentiated instruction
- Increasingly *challenging pupil populations*, including high percentages of economically-disadvantaged students and second-language learners

- Insufficient time for *collaboration and professional development*

Culture

- Dramatically test-indifferent, test-resistant *student culture*
- *Insufficient communication to align purposes* and increase understanding among teachers, administrators, pupils, parents, and the board

District and Regional Leadership

- No *systematic local program* exists to develop leadership skills and instructional understanding within and between district offices and boards.
- *No systemic models* exist to be shared /replicated by other regional providers or county offices.

Solutions to the above barriers will be generated in combination with activities aligned to the required application components.

GOALS

The overall goals of the Ventura County Regional Partnership will be to:

1. Develop and implement innovative systemic ***models*** and ***strategies*** to utilize purposeful collaboration among region, county and district partners for improved student achievement at low-performing schools and at schools with low-performing subgroups. Models will represent the following case studies including elementary, middle and high schools:
Schools qualifying for II/USP, but not working with External Evaluators;
Schools implementing approved II/USP Plans in year two; and
Schools with low similar schools ranking.
2. Build and support ***service delivery capacities*** of the county office, regional providers, districts, schools, and board members, to support low-achieving schools.
3. Broker and coordinate regional resources and utilize the current research to strengthen ***student effort and motivation*** to succeed.
4. Provide data to help schools and districts ***develop a “map” of the alignment*** between and among the California Content Standards, the content of the STAR tests, and the curriculum as it currently exists.
5. Identify the ***relevant cultural and policy contexts*** within the district/school that need to be capitalized upon, modified, or overcome in order for effective systemic change to occur.
6. Develop an innovative plan to ***showcase and disseminate*** project findings, essential learnings, effective practices and models, to easily replicate project strategies.

SOLUTIONS

When thinking about the solutions to the issues raised by local and regional partners it seemed clear that a systems approach was needed. The notion of systems thinking is not a new one; it has been around for decades. This way of thinking is based on the premise that the parts of a system function more like dynamic and complex webs of interactive loops, rather than a compartmentalized unit following clear chains of command. Thus a major component of systems thinking is looking for the connections in the system, or the ways in which changes to one part might affect or be affected by other parts in the system.

This grant employs a systemic approach to examining school improvement issues. It looks at schools as systems. The model recommended in this grant is based on a document published by McREL (Mid Continent research for Education and Learning) entitled *Asking the Right Questions: A Leader's Guide to Systems Thinking to School Improvement*.

This model defines three major facets or “domains” of school systems,” the Technical Domain, the Personal Domain, and the Organizational Domain. These domains can be thought of as “lenses” that schools may use to organize their thinking, and thus make better decisions about school change and improvement. The school’s purpose, goals, and guiding principles are the core ideas around which the three domains should revolve.

Based on systems thinking, and in an effort to support low performing schools, the AESOP Planning Team developed the following matrices to show the interrelationships of the barriers, grant components, solutions and activities.

Table 1: Standards

Barriers	Components	Solutions
Lack of articulated & aligned standards	Clear demonstration of systemic approach	Focusing on the system as a whole , comprehensively examine, analyze, evaluate & recommend improvements to the school/districts’ operational system, including: <u>Core Ideas-</u> Vision, Goals & Guiding Principles. <u>Technical Domain-</u> Standards, Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment <u>Personal Domain-</u> Staff Development, Leadership, Supervision, Communication/Feedback, Climate & Culture <u>Organizational Domain-</u> Resources, Technology, & Structures of System
Standards not fully implemented	Strong & tangible data	
Educators overwhelmed with number of standards	Increased capacity of county office & regional service providers	
	Professional development/coaching	

Key Activities:

- Arrange meeting with trained AESOP intervention team (including County Superintendent) and district/site leadership to determine scope of review process/timeline.
- Host whole-school introductory meeting, including all parents, support staff, relevant district leadership, & Board members.

- Assess school from a systemic perspective including Technical, Personal and Organizational Domains, as exemplified by professional standards such as those adopted by FCMAT, CSLA, CSTP.
- Provide professional development keyed to content and performance standards, as well as coach their degree of implementation, support and integration.
- Profile school operations through meetings with focus groups and protocol visits to each classroom, providing opportunities for input from all stakeholders.
- Compile and analyze disaggregated data to assist the school in improving the quality of instructional decision-making.
- Formulate and present recommendations designed to overcome barriers to improve student academic achievement, including for example, identifying and developing Essential Standards.

Table 2: Testing and Data

Barriers	Components	Solutions
Low levels of data-analysis proficiency among principals & teachers	Strong & tangible data analysis (& assessment) component that produces & uses disaggregated data to drive standards-based instructional decision-making	Assist school in developing a comprehensive & systemic set of data gathering, analysis, & dissemination procedures that provide meaningful information and direction for district & site administrators, teachers, pupils (at all levels of disaggregation), and parents.
Lack of common, accessible, & useable standards-based assessments		Assist school in identifying or adapting a comprehensive set of Standards-Based Instructional Benchmark Assessments that are readily given, scored, and analyzed.

Key Activities:

Data Analysis:

- Develop a detailed School Data Profile that includes salient performance, demographic, perceptual, and process data.
- Use an agreed-upon protocol to analyze collected performance data, including microanalyses of every required (& all relevant) disaggregated student subgroup(s).
- Link analyzed performance data to key instructional processes and programs, e.g., to determine efficacy of current reading and mathematics materials & teaching methods in helping all students achieve at/above grade level standards.
- Recommend a data gathering/analysis system that: a) provides data on instructional impacts to collaborative teacher teams, site administration, etc.; b) gives guidance for needed changes in instructional approach, curricula, and support materials; c) supports sustained practice of data-based instructional decision-making at classroom and schoolwide levels.
- Conduct &/or help plan staff development to improve staff competence in data-analysis.

Assessment Analysis:

- Identify needed areas of instructional intervention (though consultation of School Data Profile) and map currently adopted site/district assessments to California Content Standards and STAR assessments (SAT-9, CA Content Standards Test, etc.) to determine degree of alignment and usefulness.
- Recommend procedures for identifying, adapting, or developing appropriate Standards-Based Instructional Benchmark Assessments.
- Conduct &/or help plan staff development to ensure selection of suitable Benchmark Assessments, as well as their unanimous and uniform administration, scoring, and analysis.

Table 3: Instruction

Barriers	Components	Solutions
Under-performing teachers, little knowledge of content/differentiated instruction	Strategies to increase capacity of County office, regional service providers	Build capacity of County offices and regional service providers through mentoring by high performing districts.
Insufficient time for collaboration, professional development	Strong and tangible data	Use data analyses to identify key standards and under-performing subgroups
Challenging pupil populations; high percentages ELL, and poverty	Professional development including coaching	Accompany all data-driven professional development with coaching and collaboration

Key Activities:

- Train staff by curriculum experts to include demonstrations and coaching, focused on content and student subgroups identified by data analysis, including ELD.
- Provide professional development across district to strengthen understanding of standards rubrics, research based in strategies.
- Support school administration to schedule, productively facilitate collaborative time
- Train and support district/site curriculum mentors and teacher leadership
- Mentor at district level to share effective ways high-performing districts support schools
- Use data to identify disaggregated subgroups; focus professional development on their specific needs; use data to monitor closely, adjust accordingly
- Train and support peer coaching for both administrators and teacher triads in focus areas
- Provide professional development in standards-bases differentiated instruction
- Study groups study research on High Performing, High Poverty schools and effective instruction
- Network with higher-performing Similar School in pilot school's band
- Analyze data to identify and share practices shown to be effective with ELL, high poverty students
- Work with BTSA and university programs to assist with ELD, high poverty issues & content standards/rubrics

Table 4: Culture

Barriers	Components	Solutions
Insufficient communication among Board, district and school site staff, pupils and parents.	Clear explanation of the role of the district office in the plan.	Focusing on the system as a whole, comprehensively examine, analyze, evaluate and recommend improvements to the school/districts' operational system, including:
Lack of clarity or consensus among stakeholders.	Identification of a means to sustain the service delivery model once funding is exhausted.	<u>Core Ideas-</u> Vision, Goals and Guiding Principles.
Lack of collaboration time.	Strong and tangible data will be used to drive decision-making.	<u>Technical Domain-</u> Standards, Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
Test indifferent pupils.		<u>Personal Domain-</u> Staff Development, Leadership, Supervision, Communication/Feedback, Climate and Culture
		<u>Organizational Domain-</u> Resources, Technology, and Structures of System

Key Activities:

- Attend closely to value-added activities that build professional learning communities, create opportunities for teachers to lead and encourage individual initiative, develop structures that foster two-way communication, and celebrate student success and teacher expertise.
- Meet with district/school administrators to realign school schedules to increase opportunities for collaboration and communication.
- Provide professional development, coaching, and mentor teacher leadership to support staff and develop an on-site learning organization.
- Formulate and present recommendations designed to overcome barriers to improve student academic achievement, including for example, building a professional learning community based on: (1) supportive and shared leadership, (2) shared values and vision, (3) staff member's collective learning and application of learning, (4) supportive conditions, and (5) shared personal practice.

Table 5: Leadership

Barriers	Components	Solutions
Lack of systemic local program to develop instructional leadership within and between district offices and school boards.	Explicit strategies to advance replication.	<p>Create a highly replicable, easily disseminated model that incorporates a variety of ways to make connections and access common information, promoting sharing and collaborating on common problems/solutions between and among school sites, district offices and school boards.</p> <p>Ensure that this model fosters the making of connections among and between county offices and other regional service providers.</p>
No single/systemic model to be shared/replicated by other counties and regional providers.	Detailed dissemination plans to showcase essential learnings and distribute project findings.	
	Identification of means to sustain service delivery.	

Key Activities:**Leadership**

- Assist schools/districts in creating and sustaining local programs that address instructional leadership and understanding within and between district offices and school boards, including: a) developing activities that help these groups to communicate with one another honestly and openly; and b) using data analysis to get beyond “opinion giving” and focus on facts.
- Train school and district leaders to assess academic progress of all pupils year to year.

Dissemination

- Identify and disseminate necessary components of a replicable model.
- Develop easily duplicated/reproducible materials to be shared with other county offices and regional service providers and networks.
- Offer a collaborative presentation with other recipients of the Regional Partnership grants to demonstrate various models at: a) enhanced CCESSA mid-summer session; b) local county office and region 8 service providers and networks; c) CSBA and CCSBA annual conferences; d) Asilomar; e) School's In; and f) ACSA Annual state conference.
- Provide on-demand, net-based staff development for other interested parties (e.g. schools/districts outside Region 8) through trainings that take place in “virtual arenas” during real-time gatherings and video up-links.

DIFFERENTIATED ACTIVITIES

All schools will receive support incorporating the five AESOP Program elements enumerated above. In addition, differentiated innovative services will be applied to the three pilot schools along a continuum of Formal/Intensive to Informal/Supportive Interventions depending upon AESOP findings. Teams will be formed that offer expertise aligned with identified needs. Team members will include County Office administrators, curriculum experts, and district/site expert practitioners from high-performing districts and schools. These team members will serve as effective models of skilled leadership and targeted services. “Out of the box” interventions – not to be found in other regional support programs of this type – to be applied to these schools/districts shall include, but are not limited to the following:

- Raising the expectations of academic excellence for all students and providing academic and non-academic opportunities for success by visiting higher achieving Similar Schools or Distinguished Schools.
- Demonstrating how higher achievement can be attained in low-performing classes.
- Providing professional development/mentoring for principals focused upon the 12-Step PQR/CSLA Model for School Change
- Collaborating with site principal/teachers to retain a balanced curriculum that keeps students connected to their schooling, including the arts, elective, and technical/vocational programs especially designed to support the academic curriculum.
- Collaborating with site principal/teachers to link programs such as School to Career with academic standards.
- Training staff to conduct Action Research focused upon resolving perceived barriers to change and improvement.
- Identifying positive model campuses with effective student behavior management and maintenance of a safe, orderly environment.
- Consulting with district/school administrators as they strive to solve problems related to unaligned student and school schedules, unbalanced class lists, ineffective discipline plans, misallocated resources, and other organizational challenges.
- Assisting district/school administrators as they find ways and incentives to re-assign expert teachers to traditionally low-performing pupil populations.
- Supporting School Leadership Teams as they redesign, model, and monitor results of reformatted instruction for at-risk or low-performing students, replacing traditional instruction with lessons aligned to Gardiner’s Multiple Intelligences.
- Guiding district/school personnel in acquiring a common professional library at the pilot school sites featuring current research and thinking of Wiggins, Stiggins, Schmoker, and Marzano, *et al.*
- Assisting district/school personnel to develop a model parent education workshop to engage parents in support of targeted curricular/instructional innovations.
- Assisting districts/schools in obtaining and using effective technology support.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Phase I: Research and develop AESOP Intervention Model identify and train Team members; compile support and training materials; and select Pilot Schools (June – December, 2001).

Phase II: Implement AESOP pilot; evaluate initial pilot project results; and disseminate findings (January – June, 2002).

Phase III: Refine and improve AESOP model, and disseminate on ongoing basis (June, 2002 and beyond).

PROGRAM EVALUATION

A written, end-of-project report depicting actual expenditures, activities, progress and pitfalls experienced during the pilot project will be prepared and submitted to the Education Support and Networks Division by July 2002.

CLOSING

The development of this grant proposal was a great opportunity for county office and regional providers to work together to conceptualize a model that we believe will be highly effective in working with schools of differing strengths and challenges. Our process, although sometimes challenging, was to get into a room together utilizing each other's strengths and knowledge to reach consensus on what was most important in our role to assist low-performing schools. We know this typifies the collaboration that will have to happen when working with schools and school districts.

At the request of Dr. Weis, the team will continue meeting to design a Menu of Services specifically delineating services and formalizing agreements to begin our work with low performing schools. Upon completion, local and regional districts will be presented with a selection of service levels most appropriate for their size, student population, staff and community.

We continue to think differently about the county's role in delivery of services. As an example, while we have scheduled nationally known speakers over the past several years, the team is "rethinking" the audiences, time allocation, and follow-up utilization of the valuable resources these speakers bring. Doug Reeves will again present to our area principals network in October. However, added to his schedule of presentations is a session with district superintendents and school board members. The difficult task of thinking through the grant application allowed the team "structured time" to process what a coordinated, strategic and focused would look like. We appreciate the opportunity to apply for this grant and truly believe that we have the demonstrated capacity to develop highly effective and user-friendly replicable models.